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Written on AUGUST 12, 2014 AT 6:00 AM by SVANDERWERFF

## Hello Anna: A Letter to my Former Self

Filed under LEADERSHIP, MILITARY MEDICINE, U.S. NAVY

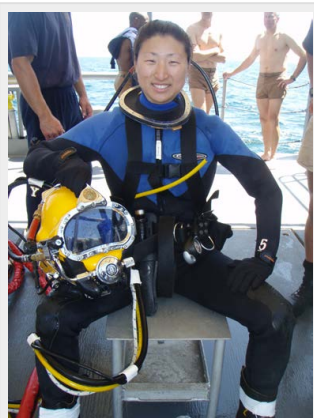
(2 COMMENTS)

**By Lt. Cmdr. Anna Choe, MC (UMO/DMO)**



A choice billet with Navy salvage divers in Hawaii

Dear Anna,



U.S. Navy Diver and an Undersea Medical Officer (UMO)

You are not going to believe this, so I hope you are sitting down. It's me, actually you, in 2014. You know how sometimes we want to know how things will turn out. Well, at least in this moment, I can predict your short-term future. Short version/Highlights: – You become a [U.S. Navy Diver](#) and an [Undersea Medical Officer](#) (UMO). Yes! You passed the Dive PST (Physical Screening Test), but you have to work your butt off. This is NO joke! – You get deployed to Afghanistan and don't die. The people you meet from this deployment will teach you the meaning of what it means to be a Navy physician. – You actually get your first choice billet with Navy salvage divers in Hawaii. Oh yeah, you heard me. This made your rough introduction to the military worth it.

- You actually get your first choice, the [Pediatrics](#)

[Program](#) at [Naval Medical Center San Diego](#) (NMCSD). You just had to wait seven years to get the training of your choice, but it was totally worth the wait. – Oh, and you decided to make this a career. I would love to tell you the whole story, but you'll live it soon. For now, there are some things I want you to

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Seven years to get the training of choice, but it was totally worth the wait.

know. Do you know what would have helped me (you in 2014) the most? Besides enjoying the heck out of your UMO lifestyle, PLEEEEEEASE read and work Graduate Medical Education (GME) into your schedule, as permitted. I can tell you there is tremendous academic pain in returning to GME after six years. Nothing can take the place of the experiences you gained during your time in the fleet, but you will struggle, less during internship/residency if you stay plugged into your specialty of choice. You learned a lot of things while you were away from the hospital. You learned Navy acronyms. You figured out where people and commands fit in the big picture, the overall military chain of command. You found that there is probably a Navy instruction for just about everything. You traveled and saw all sorts of things you never knew existed. You met people from all over and heard their interesting stories. You learned that people take care of each other, or are learning how to take care of each other. You learned about the culture of being a U.S. Navy Sailor, and take pride in it. What I'm trying to say is, you drank the Kool-Aid. Can't believe it, right?



I either helped take care of these little infants when they were in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit or see them in Continuity Clinic.

You know that word “leadership” people keep talking about? Well, it actually comes alive during your J.O. (Junior Officer) years in the fleet and you will see why it's so important. I encourage you to make it a point to educate and support the corpsmen. Some want to go to medical school like you did. On a practical level, they have much less training than you, but have to work the front lines in hostile areas. Back them up, but keep them accountable. “Trust, but verify” still applies. You know how some “Attending’s” expected a lot of you, and as painful and intimidating as that was, you worked hard and became stronger and smarter? Similarly, don't be afraid to expect excellence. Accepting or fixing their satisfactory work is a disservice to them. Provide feedback and tell them to do it again. They might not like you, but it's okay. You will be blessed with some of the best mentors, from crusty ol' master chiefs to captains, ever who will make things seem clear. Leadership is a lot of things, but I think it comes down to the root of caring about your people. It's a constant process and I'm still learning how to be a better leader. Trust your training and be encouraged. You have gone through a lot of studying and testing. You are capable of a lot of things. In my humble opinion, I have not yet found, at least until 2014, a profession that works as hard as physicians. We are trained to a high standard because if we don't do our jobs, people die. Those skills cross-over to other areas of life and work, and serve you well. You'll be asked to do a lot of things that you don't feel qualified for.

October 2014 (15)

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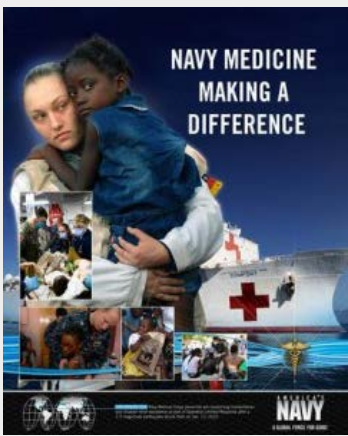
May 2012 (22)

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Part of leadership is being taken outside of your comfort zone and growing tremendously as a result. Be creative and find out all the opportunities that are available to you. One woman can only do so much. You will learn when to say no, and be ok with it. You will make some people angry by doing your job the right way, and its ok. Pick your battles. You will learn to stand up for yourself especially being a female in a predominantly male community, and as a minority. Just do your best. Be a tourist where you live. Have fun – Travel. Thank your parents, more than usual, because life is short. And most importantly, pray. (Don't forget to read!!) I wish I could tell you more, but that's up to God and time. You'll be fine, at least until 2014. Pray for the both of us. We still have a long way to go. Hang in there and enjoy the ride! HOO-YAH! Sincerely, Me



Be creative and find out all the opportunities that are available to you.

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John Paul Mitchell

So awesome to see you doing so well Anna! You are truly an amazing person!

Adriene Raleigh

I know your Daddy is proud of you my dear friend!! I add my own admiration as well!